

Dear Salesian Co-Operators,

regional member of the world council - regional council or regional consulta - regional office - regional congress: What do all these terms mean?

These terms mentioned above become more and more familiar to me since my election as the regional member of the world council. This election took place in October 2019 at the regional congress held in Vienna. But over and over again I realize how little these terms mean in our daily life as Salesian Co-Operators and sometimes even to myself. Therefore, I would like to explain those terms in short before I am going to talk about my service in the region.

Region:

11 worldwide regions have been created for the about 30.000 Salesian Co-Operators (see map). Their aim is the animation of the Association (Art 37 §5 of the Statute). Each of these regions, from Eastern Asia through Europe up to Southern America, elects one male/female Co-Operator as their representative into the world council of the Salesian Co-Operators.



Region Europe Central West:

As an abbreviation for our region, RECO (derived from French **R**égion d'Europe **c**entrale **o**uest) has proven extremely useful for the different languages spoken in it. Part of RECO are:

Belgium-South (French spoken)	5 LC	72 Co-Operators
Belgium-North + Netherlands (Dutch spoken)	6 LC	97 Co-Operators
Germany + German speaking Switzerland + Turkey	17 LC	201 Co-Operators
France + French speaking Switzerland	21 LC	232 Co-Operators

United Kingdom	13 LC	203 Co-Operators
Ireland (isolated Co-Operators)	0 LC	3 Co-Operators
Austria	14 LC	229 Co-Operators

LC mens local centre. With a total number of a little more than 1.000 Co-Operators we are a comparably small region.

Regional consulta (named regional council in the statute):

Members of the regional consulta are the regional member of the world council, who presides over it, the Provincial Coordinators, the Delegates of the SDB and the FMA plus additional Co-Operators who give support with the animation (Art 34 §3 of the implementing regulations annex to the statute). The regional consulta should meet at least once a year. At those meetings of the regional consulta the “challenges of the apostolate and of the formation and education are shared for the benefit of the entire region” (Art 34 §2 of the implementing regulations annex to the statute). The regional consulta therefore is not a body with deciding powers but an organ of animation. That is why we decided to drop the “old” term of regional council, because we felt that in contrast to the provincial or world councils which have deciding powers the regional consulta is explicitly lacking them.

Regional office:

The regional office is not to be found within our statute but in the directory, which was elaborated by the persons responsible for our region. It was called into existence at the regional congress 2009 held in Jünkerath. It is meant to give support to the regional member of the world council in organizing the regional consulta and in animating the region. Presently the regional office consists of: Jan Daems (Belgium-North) and Christiane Liebl (Austria), both as secretaries; Carine D’Hondt (Belgium-North) as responsible person concerning education; Norbert Fedke (Germany) as administrator and Barbara Klose (Germany) as present regional member of the world council. In addition, the former regional member of the world council, Franz Defaut (Belgium–South), is regularly taking part in the meetings of the regional office. During the one-year transition period in which we jointly guided the region I realized the importance of his knowledge.

Regional Delegates of the SDB and of the FMA:

At present, our region has no regional Delegates. But we are engaged in talks with the two world Delegates on this matter because our region needs regional delegates for animation. That is why we presently invite all the Delegates of the different provinces to the meetings of the regional consulta.

Regional congress:

All members of the provincial councils within our region plus the members of the regional consulta form the regional congress. It should be called into session at least once every three

years. It is either an electoral congress for the election of the regional member of the world council (every six years) or it serves for in depth discussion of themes relating to the development of the Salesian charisma and of the Association (Art 29 §3 of the implementing regulations annex to the statute). In doing so it also reflects the Association's situation within the region and gives it regulatory guidelines.

So that would be the end of my little glossary of the most important terms in the life of the RECO region. Maybe one or another of you asks her/himself: Why do we need all that? Well, there are two answers to that: Firstly, it is codified in that way in our statute for Salesian Co-Operators. Therefore, we have to implement it and do what is possible to get it going. Secondly **YES**, we absolutely need it. If we manage to overcome the language barriers the exchange of ideas with Co-Operators from other countries or even continents will inspire and enrich us all. We can learn from one another and spare to ourselves to "reinvent the wheel" that is already in full spin in other provinces. Looking at other provinces will also help us getting a realistic assessment of our own situation. This view has the potential to ground us. That is why I am happy and grateful for the connections into the RECO region.

Thanks to Corona !?!?

I hope not to sound cynical but looking back we have to acknowledge that because of corona we meet quite regularly online since May 2020. Even though we had to cancel the first meeting of the regional office scheduled in March 2020 we could get several things going. This would have been much more bothersome offline through face-to-face meetings because of the long traveling distances. For example, we had an online meeting on November 13th concerning Pope Francis' message to the 28th general chapter. This meeting was primarily intended for those in the provinces who are responsible for educational matters. But the provincial Coordinators and the provincial Delegates were also invited plus single co-operators who were recommended by the provinces. The feedback for this meeting was positive all over. We put very much weight upon exchange. This is perhaps reflected by the fact that a female co-operator from the local centre of Istanbul was present among the German participants. On November 14th the very first meeting of the regional consulta ensued which was mainly aimed at introducing the single provinces to one another. The second meeting of the regional consulta on January 29th, 2021 dealt with more profane organizational matters.

Which are our issues?

Our issues are very diverse. Among other things we occupy ourselves with organization and structural matters like the nomination of regional Delegates by SDB and FMA or the implementation and maintenance of a website or even a cloudbased blog as a reference site for important texts. The search for co-operators or other persons who are close to Don Bosco's ideas and could give support in translation is another issue. And of course we have the task of planning an agenda for the next six years. All those issues are important to make sure that all provinces in the region get to know about each other in an easy way and hear of all new and

important facts. But the prime importance for us is an exchange among the provinces about the following points:

- appointment of lay Delegates for local centres who do not have any SDB or FMA in proximity
- preparing for new vocations, accompanying them and inspiring the local centres
- the process of education within the local centres
- actual exchange on everything that works and also on those things which do not work

What is the core of my own service?

As the regional member of the world council, president of the regional consulta and director of the regional office it is my prime request to establish a network with the other provinces. Regional office and regional consulta should not exist as further abstract institutions within the structure of Salesian Co-Operators that hardly anyone has heard of. No, it is our wish that our work is connected to real faces and is regarded as enriching for the time to come. Therefore, the personal contact with co-operators from all provinces is so important to me. Even though travelling is not possible these days the internet opens opportunities for us which we had not thought of if not for corona. For example, I could take part online in a meeting of the French regional council at the beginning of February 2021. They occupied themselves only with one theme: how can real contact and exchange happen on local level in time of corona, where are difficulties, what solutions can be found etc. A survey had been held before in each local centre. As a result, in France another online meeting will be held together with the local coordinators on this issue. It should define where further assistance can be provided. But at the moment all provinces of our region and all over the world are facing this same problem. So it can be potentially helpful to know about this process and its results. But in this respect we still stand at the very beginning and we depend on the cooperation and support of the different regional councils to moderate such an exchange.

Final remarks:

Why do I speak of regional member of the world council and not of regional councilor? Simply, because I am representing our RECO region in the world council. Into this council belong the 12 regional members (Africa sends one English speaking and one French speaking member), the world coordinator Antonio Boccia, the world Delegates of the SDB and the FMA and the members of the world office. All the meetings of the world council have been online so far. This has not made it easier for me to get acquainted with my new service. But there are still a few years to come! If you have questions or suggestions or topics, I would be delighted to receive your comments at this mail address: cm-reco@donbosco.de